

Biologists predict excellent dove hunting in Texas

Wash out that peach bucket and stock up on number nines; Texas wingshooters will want to take full advantage of this dove season. If there are any doubters as to just how prime the hunting should be, just find a fallow field; it'll be the one covered waist deep in sunflower and croton.

Sept. 1 marked the opening day for dove season in Texas in the North and Central Zones for the umpteenth consecutive year (Sept. 20 in the South Zone).

This year, approximately 400,000 Texas dove hunters will take part in the 60-day season, which for the fourth straight year, will offer a 15 bird daily bag limit for mourning doves.

Aside from the fact the season will probably always open Sept. 1, the only other guarantee with dove hunting is there are no guarantees. "The birds are usually where you find them and less than 15% of wingshooters can boast filling their daily bag once in a season," said Jay Roberson, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) dove program leader. "In fact, estimates show the average dove hunter will harvest just four birds per outing, 13 for the season, so plan on carrying plenty of shotshells." Hunter success will track more on shooting ability than target availability this year, as breeding dove populations have increased significantly statewide.

"This spring's breeding popu-

lation index was up 29% in Texas; the highest since 1992," Roberson said dove populations in Texas remain at or above the long term average and annual fluctuations are typical. "The increase this year alone made up for the accumulative declines in the index over the previous two years.

"However, hunters in the field will only see an increase if more young are produced and if feed is available in the area they hunt."

He noted over half the doves taken by hunters each year are produced during that year. "The peak of nesting has just past and most areas of the state look very good," he explained.

"Bad weather in May in some areas of the state have destroyed some nests but weather in late June, the peak period of production, was very good for producing doves. Add to this the abundant feed being produced by above average accumulated precipitation statewide and we may have a record year."

Hunters interested in scouting for doves should look in areas where the dove's life requisites - feed, water, roosts - are all provided in close proximity.

This year, feed may be the most critically limiting of the three factors, according to Roberson. "Native sunflower fields, croton (doveweed) or milo fields should hold a lot of birds this year. Doves feed on the surface of the ground

by sight and generally do not scratch for seed," he said. "They generally like good horizontal visibility and unimpeded escape so stubble or crop residue from shredding is best if less than four inches high. Scouting just a few days before the season may avoid any unpleasant surprises, as doves shift

their feeding habits as seed in one area dwindles and another increases."

Some of the better dove hunting may be found this year on TPWD public dove leases. Dove hunting rights to over 100 leases have been purchased using funds from the Annual Public Hunting

Permit. For \$40, a hunter will have the hunting rights to any of these dove leases, as well as over a million additional acres of public hunting lands in Texas.

"We've signed a tremendous number of public dove leases, from Falfurios to George West," (See Doves, Page 15)

Clifton Tyler's Club... top-notch hunting with the best

Preparing for waterfowl hunting season each year goes far beyond leasing land and hiring guides for Clifton Tyler. "One of the most often asked questions is why hunters can't hunt the natural ponds that form on the prairie," Tyler commented.

The answer may surprise you... "Because there aren't any," he said. They hamper farming operations, so in working land farmers cut drainage slopes so the natural prairie formations will not hold water.

Each year, Tyler and crew rework those natural pond areas so they will hold water, at least for the season. Once drainage lines are closed, hunting operations depend on rain to fill them. If not, Tyler said he would even go to the expense of having water pumped in. All in all, 20 to 30 ponds are cre-

ated each year.

Even after the ponds are covered with birds hunters aren't allowed to stalk their prey at the water's edge. Tyler stated the ponds are for attracting the birds into certain field areas and to hold them there. Without water, the birds would fly on to other areas.

Tyler and his guides know where that water is and put hunters into an area a field or two away. This placement enhances the morning's hunt and explains the reason hunters need to be in the fields well before shooting time. They want to make sure all is ready when the birds come off the water.

Clifton has a long history of working with visiting hunting groups and has been one of the top duck and goose guides in this area for more than 20 years.

He has put that experience into

his own duck and goose hunting club known as the Clifton Tyler Goose Hunting Club. It has thousands of acres of top rice land scattered across the Eagle Lake and Garwood prairies.

The rice prairies of Eagle Lake and Garwood are the winter home for the largest concentration of wild geese in the world.

"Run and Shoot" provides some of the best hunts of the year. All hunters enjoyed the action very much.

"I was surprised by the number of successful decoying hunts. It had always been thought that by Feb. geese are too smart to decoy. This simply is not correct," Tyler said. "With proper conditions, we have enjoyed some outstanding decoying shoots. I believe that the main factor is a lack of hunting pressure during that time of the year. The geese are calm and inclined to maintain their anticipated flight patterns."

The Tyler Hunting Club will again offer the "Run and Shoot" which is for snow geese only. This will take place during late Jan. and Feb. when there's not much pressure in the fields, allowing the hunters and guides greater mobility. It is also meant to be a fun time for everyone involved.

The price is \$75 per man which will allow those thinking about hunting geese, but not sure if that's what they would like to do, to take part in the experience without incurring a large expense.

Tyler's Club can accommodate up to 60 hunters with a four-per-party minimum.

A guide will be provided for each hunt from legal shooting time until noon only. Decoys, white spreads and parkas are furnished. Every guide has his own trained retrievers.

Tyler, who has lived in this area all of his life, has experienced guides available for the hunter including: Rod Adkins, Mike Mangum, Bobby Marsalia, Bobby Joe Marsalia, Neil Marsalia, Paul Marsalia, Bryan Wiese, Matt Weller, Michael Wiese, Steve Almanza, Dustin Losak, Gary Blair and Kenneth Blair, all from Eagle Lake; Nolan Blaschke and Chris Condon from Columbus; Rex Mobley of Dallas; as well as Dennis Sbrusch and Carl Thilenius.

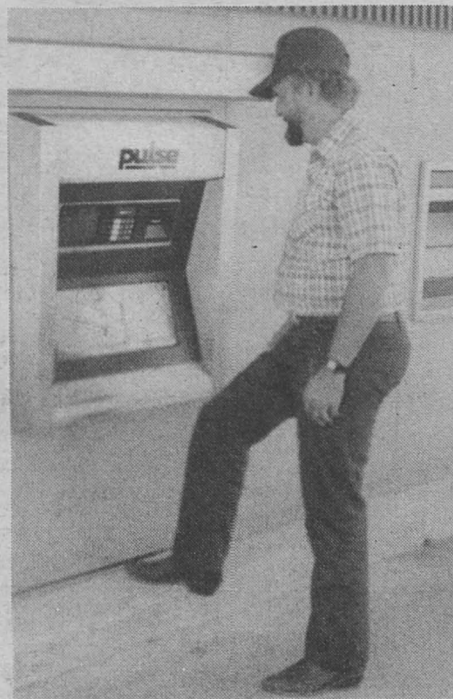
For reservations, you may contact Ida or Clifton Tyler at 409-234-3346 or 409-732-6502 (Columbus); or write to 1139 Fannin, Columbus, Texas 78934.

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